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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the twentieth submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of Council resolution 2165 (2014) and paragraph 5 of Council resolution 2191 (2014), in which the Council requested me to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on the data available to the United Nations agencies on the ground, from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and from open sources. Data from United Nations agencies and partners on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 to 30 September 2015. More recent data have also been included when available.

II. Major developments

A. Political/military

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in September. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks in places with a large presence of civilians, including the use of barrel bombs by government forces and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups[1] continued to kill, injure and displace civilians. The conduct of hostilities by all parties continued to be characterized by widespread disregard for international humanitarian law and their obligation to protect civilians.

4. On 30 September, air strikes from Russian forces commenced and were reported principally in Hama, Idlib, Homs and Ladhiqiyah; limited strikes were also reported in Raqqah, Dayr al-Zawr and Rif Dimashq governorates. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received reports

[1] On 30 May 2013, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front were designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council in accordance with resolution 1267 (1999). The two groups operate in the Syrian Arab Republic.

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that Zaafarani village was struck, killing at least 11 civilians and wounding more than 50 others. Rastan was also struck, killing six civilians, four of whom were children. Residential neighbourhoods in Tallbisah were also reportedly hit, killing at least 15 civilians.

5. In Damascus and Rif Dimashq governorates, high levels of fighting and violence between Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups resulted in death and injury to civilians. On 10 September, non-State armed opposition groups made advances from eastern Ghutah towards Tall al-Kurdi and reached positions close to Adra Prison and Dahiyat al-Asad in Rif Dimashq. Around 15,000 civilians were temporarily displaced from Dahiyat al-Asad and surrounding areas as a result. Government forces subsequently halted the advances in Dahiyat al-Asad. Non-State armed opposition groups captured part of the main road from Damascus to Homs resulting in the closure of the road for three days. The road has officially reopened, but traffic remains diverted as Government forces attempt to regain the area from non-State armed opposition groups. Furthermore, non-State armed opposition groups continued shelling civilian areas inside the capital during the reporting period, launching more than 80 mortars, which killed some 38 civilians and injured around 250 more.

6. Government forces continued their aerial and ground attacks in Duma in eastern Ghutah during the reporting period, including on civilian areas, killing at least 25 civilians and injuring at least 270 more. A school in Duma reportedly suffered significant damages on 20 September as a result of the bombardments. Other locations in eastern Ghutah were also subject to attack. For example, in nearby Harasta town, reports indicate that government jets hit a residential area on 6 September, killing four civilians. On 7 September, OHCHR received reports that government forces hit the vicinity of the Kaws Bakkin checkpoint, where displaced residents of Zabadani were crowding, killing six civilians.

7. On 22 September, a conditional ceasefire agreement was reached for Zabadani and Madaya in Rif Dimashq governorate and Foah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate, as well as some surrounding areas. Prior to the agreement, pro-government and Hizbullah forces had continued to make advances in Zabadani in early September, seizing control of the Jisr district and pushing fighters and inhabitants into the city centre. Pro-government advances in Zabadani were accompanied by bombardments on Madaya and Buqayn, causing casualties among civilians. Meanwhile, in Foah and Kafraya, Jaish al-Fateh (comprising non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusrah Front) had continued to attack both villages prior to the ceasefire: on 19 September, nine vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and more than 1,200 rockets were fired, killing 60 people and injuring 300 more.

8. After the conditional ceasefire agreement, on 26 September, government warplanes bombarded Taftanaz, a town near Foah and Kafraya included in the ceasefire agreement. Non-State armed opposition groups retaliated by shelling Foah and Kafraya with more than 20 mortars. Despite these developments, and unabated fighting in nearby areas, the ceasefire agreement continued to hold as at 14 October. While the United Nations was not a party to the agreement, signatories requested the United Nations and other humanitarian actors to facilitate the humanitarian provisions of the agreement, including evacuation of the critically injured and delivery of humanitarian assistance. On 2 October, the United Nations and partners had to suspend their planned humanitarian intervention mission in support of the

ceasefire agreement because of insecurity along the proposed route and last minute disagreements among the parties. However, the joint team made up of the United Nations and other partners has made all necessary preparations and remains ready immediately to implement the humanitarian provisions of the agreement when conditions allow. On 12 October, my Special Envoy for the Syrian Arab Republic, Staffan de Mistura, urged the Governments of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic to allow critical humanitarian support in the areas covered by the agreement.

9. Fighting continued in Idlib governorate during the reporting period. Jaish al-Fateh seized control of Abu al-Duhur airbase on 9 September, the last remaining government-held military installation in Idlib. Civilians in Al-Duhur town and surrounding villages fled to other, safer areas in Idlib governorate during the advance. On 16 September, eight civilians were killed when government helicopters dropped barrel bombs on Safoohan village in Idlib, according to reports received by OHCHR. On 30 September, government air strikes reportedly hit the town of Dana in north-west Idlib near the border with Turkey, killing and injuring several people.

10. In Aleppo governorate, fighting continued in Aleppo city during the reporting period. Pro-government forces and non-State armed opposition groups continued mutual shelling inside the city, causing a number of casualties among civilians. On 15 September, more than 35 people, including 17 children, were reportedly killed and some 160 others were injured as a result of shelling by non-State armed opposition groups on the Midan, Salaheddine, Hamdaniyah and New Aleppo neighbourhoods. In eastern Aleppo city, OHCHR reported that more than 20 civilians were reportedly killed and dozens injured on 21 September, when government planes reportedly fired missiles on a market and residential area of the Shaar neighbourhood. Elsewhere, clashes erupted in late September between the Kurdish People's Protection Units and the Nusrah Front, as well as other non-State armed opposition groups, in the Al-Sheikh Maksood neighbourhood, resulting in multiple civilian deaths and injuries and temporarily affecting access to eastern Aleppo city. A truce was later agreed. Meanwhile, government forces also continued air strikes on other parts of Aleppo governorate; for example, on 24 and 25 September attacks against the town of Hayyan allegedly killed two civilians.

11. Attacks continued to be launched by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in various governorates during the reporting period. In northern Aleppo governorate, ISIL sustained its offensive on Mare'a town, which is under the control of non-State armed opposition groups. However, non-State armed opposition groups continued to withstand the offensive. International coalition air strikes against ISIL also continued in the area. On 9 October, ISIL advanced south of Mare'a, seizing a number of villages in the Handarat area of the Aleppo countryside, close to Aleppo city.

12. In Hasakah governorate, ISIL conducted two attacks using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices on 14 September: the first exploded in the Al-Mahatta area, reportedly killing at least 12 civilians; the second occurred in Khashman district, killing five and wounding 70 more. In Damascus governorate, ISIL launched an offensive in the first few days of September against the Assali district in southern Damascus city (which was under local agreement between the Government and non-State armed opposition groups), gaining control of almost half of the district. In early October, ISIL and non-State armed opposition groups

reportedly reached a ceasefire agreement covering Assali and Qadam. In Homs, ISIL advanced in the eastern part of the governorate, gaining control of the Jazal oilfield following fighting with government forces. Jazal was the last remaining oilfield under government control.

13. Fighting continued between ISIL and government forces in Dayr al-Zawr governorate; ISIL continued its attacks on the Dayr al-Zawr military airbase, capturing two military camps near the airport and reportedly killing tens of pro-government forces on 10 September. Meanwhile, on 28 September, an air strike by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in the vicinity of the marketplace in Mayadin resulted in the death of at least 40 civilians.

14. In Hama governorate, heavy fighting was reported between the Nusrah Front and non-State armed opposition groups, and government forces, in various locations along the Ghab plain. Non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusrah Front made advances on government positions along the Ghab plain, notably the mountains overlooking rural Ladhiqiyah governorate. Reports of non-State armed opposition groups shelling on Ladhiqiyah city, including Bassel al-Assad airport, were also received. In early October, government forces launched a major offensive in northern Hama to reverse these gains. Approximately 7,000 families were displaced from northern Hama and nearby areas in Idlib as a result. In Ladhiqiyah governorate, government forces launched an offensive on non-State armed group positions, seizing several villages and contesting the major town of Salma. Air strikes by the Russian Federation were also reported in the area.

15. In Homs governorate, government forces continued their aerial bombardment on areas held by non-State armed groups in the northern countryside. For example, OHCHR sources reported that government forces carried out six aerial attacks on Rastan city on 1 September, killing at least five people. In response, non-State armed opposition groups launched an operation known as "150 rockets and missiles" on government positions in north Rastan. Meanwhile, in Homs city, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in the government-controlled Al-Zahra' neighbourhood killed one civilian and injured 15 others on 22 September. On 23 September, another such device exploded at a roundabout in the Akrama neighbourhood, killing two civilians and injuring seven others. In the last week of September, rockets reportedly landed in the government-controlled Zahra', Abbasiyah, Walid and Wadi al-Dahab neighbourhoods, resulting in two deaths.

16. In the Wa'r district of Homs city, multiple shelling and attacks from pro-government forces in the surrounding areas were reported in September. On 4 and 5 September, five civilians were killed and more than eight injured as a result of shelling from pro-government groups. On 26 September, a government-launched surface-to-surface missile hit a playground, close to an orphanage, killing 22 civilians, including 14 children. On 30 September, surface-to-surface rockets hit a school used as a shelter for internally displaced persons, resulting in one civilian casualty. Since 31 August, pro-government forces have closed all roads leading to Wa'r. Negotiations between the parties on a local agreement continued, but humanitarian supplies have not been allowed to enter Wa'r.

17. Fighting in the southern governorates of the Syrian Arab Republic was also reported during September. In Suwayda governorate, on 4 September, reports indicate that an improvised explosive device detonated in Suwayda city near a convoy of Sheikh Wahid Al-Balous (a Druze spiritual leader and head of the Rejal

al-Karama movement) killed several people, including Al-Balous, and injured many more. The initial attack was followed by a second such device in the vicinity of the nearby National Hospital, to which the injured from the first attack had been taken. In total, at least 33 people were killed in both attacks. The attacks were followed by a period of unrest in Suwayda city, which led to government forces cutting all main routes to and from the city for three days. In Qunaytirah governorate, non-State armed opposition groups reportedly made advances against government positions in the north-east of the governorate, with the aim of opening a supply line from Qunaytirah to western Ghutah in Rif Dimashq governorate.

18. In Dar'a governorate, OHCHR reported that government forces fired a surface-to-surface missile on a residential neighbourhood in Dar'a al-Mahata on 11 September, killing six members of the same family, including three children. On 16 September, at least 20 civilians were killed and at least 40 more wounded when government forces reportedly dropped barrel bombs on a market in Busra al-Sham. The day before, on 15 September, the Free Syrian Army's Southern Front announced the halt of its attack on Dar'a city. This came after three unsuccessful attempts to capture the city over the past few months.

19. Displacement continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in September and early October, with over 80,000 people displaced from various areas in Homs, Aleppo, Rif Dimashq, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama and Idlib governorates owing to ongoing fighting. There were also reports of forced relocation of some 1,000 people in early September by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic from Bludan and Mamoura Isha'at to Buqayn town. Since mid-August, some 2,200 formerly displaced families, 80 per cent of whom were Palestine refugees, returned to Husayniyah in Rif Dimashq from other parts of the governorate.

20. Civilian infrastructure continued to be targeted during the reporting period. Water was not available for a total of 17 days in Aleppo city, affecting some 2.1 million people. The unavailability was due to a combination of cuts by non-State armed opposition groups and general degradation of infrastructure. As a result of the water shortages, many people resorted to drinking from untreated and unsafe water supplies. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) used trucks to bring in water for some 700,000 people per day when the water system was down. Meanwhile, in Raqqah governorate, ISIL reportedly cut electricity supply to Raqqah city for two weeks in September, on the basis that people were not paying their electricity bills. The electricity supply reportedly remained available in rural areas to ensure irrigation of agricultural lands. Separately, in Raqqah governorate, amid a shortage of potable water, UNICEF delivered water treatment materials for 100 million litres of water.

21. Cultural heritage continued to be targeted during the reporting period. In early October, the antiquities chief of the Syrian Arab Republic confirmed that the Arch of Triumph, a second century monument, had been destroyed by ISIL in Palmyra.

22. In addition to the above-mentioned ceasefire agreement in Zabadani, Madaya, Foah, Kafraya and surrounding areas, there were developments regarding several local agreements. On 17 September, an agreement was concluded between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and representatives of Tiba, a town south of Damascus city. In accordance with the terms of the truce, the road between Tiba town and Khan Dannun was reopened and many people displaced from Tiba returned to their homes. In Barzeh, the local agreement came under pressure after

government forces killed one civilian and arrested another on 2 September. In response, non-State armed opposition groups blocked the road passing through the district to Tishreen Hospital used by the Government and civilians. However, as of mid-September, a reconciliation accord was reportedly reached, enabling the reopening of the road into the city and the movement of civilians.

23. In Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, reconciliation negotiations continued, with non-State armed opposition groups reportedly agreeing to halt fighting on 9 September, with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic concomitantly sending wheat flour and vegetables to the area. On 13 September, it was reported that government and private sector employees, as well as students, could move in and out of Qudsaya. In Madamiyet, where an initial local agreement had been in place, there was repeated shelling by government forces during the reporting period, including on a bread distribution centre killing two people on 2 September, as well as increased movement restrictions around government checkpoints.

24. The Special Envoy continued his consultations with international, regional and Syrian interlocutors, including the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-State armed and political opposition groups, in support of the thematic working groups and towards forming a contact group. These consultations took place in the region with the League of Arab States and the European Union, and in the margins of the high-level debate of the General Assembly. On 22 September, the Special Envoy announced the appointment of the facilitators to lead the four working groups.

B. Human rights

25. The scale and severity of abuses and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law remained grave over the reporting period. OHCHR continued to receive allegations and to document cases of arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment, and deaths in custody inside government detention centres. Victims interviewed by OHCHR reported that they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in Mezzeh military airport in Damascus and the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Bab Tuma, both of which fall within the oversight of the Ministry of Defence. Witnesses also spoke of other detainees, including women, being subjected to torture in these facilities. OHCHR also received allegations from former detainees who reported witnessing sexual and gender-based violence and death while in detention as a result of torture in the Palestine Branch of Syrian Military Intelligence in Damascus. OHCHR has seen no indication of the Government undertaking any investigation into allegations of crimes committed by its forces.

26. Non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups also detained civilians in areas under their control. Dozens of residents of Idlib governorate were arbitrarily arrested and detained by the Nusrah Front during the reporting period. For example, on 2 September, Nusrah Front fighters detained an unknown number of protestors in Khan Shaykhun after they demonstrated against the detention of a local religious leader.

27. OHCHR received reports of ISIL executing seven men in Homs governorate on 22 September because of their sexual orientation. On 20 September, ISIL executed a woman in Dayr al-Zawr governorate for allegedly cooperating with non-State armed opposition groups. Separately, on 24 September, ISIL reportedly

killed three Assyrian captives who were detained along with over 200 other Assyrian people in February 2015 in Tall Tamr, Hasakeh governorate.

28. On 10 September, Nusrah Front fighters, as well as other non-State armed opposition groups, reportedly executed over 50 captured government soldiers following the takeover of Abu al-Duhur military base in Idlib governorate.

29. In my statement to the General Assembly in New York on 28 September, I called for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

C. Humanitarian response

30. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need in September through all modalities from within the Syrian Arab Republic and across borders pursuant to Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). The World Food Programme (WFP) delivered food assistance for over 4 million people in 12 governorates. The World Health Organization (WHO) distributed medicines and supplies for over 750,000 treatments in eight governorates. UNICEF reached 2.5 million people with multisector support, including through the launch of the Back to Learning campaign targeting some 2.2 million children attending school, and other programmes targeting 700,000 out-of-school children with non-formal learning initiatives. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reached around 175,000 people with core relief items and protection services in three governorates. The United Nations Population Fund delivered, through implementing partners, 315,000 reproductive health and gender-based violence services, including emergency obstetric care and family planning in support of 106,000 people. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reached almost 50,000 people with food and agricultural assistance. The International Organization for Migration delivered basic relief items for over 40,000 people. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided support to more than 324,000 Palestine refugees. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continued to provide basic services to areas under its control, as well as in many areas beyond its control.

31. Cross-border deliveries continued during the reporting period. As at 30 September, the United Nations and its implementing partners had sent 189 shipments (127 from Turkey and 62 from Jordan) to the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). These included food assistance for over 2.1 million people; non-food items for 1.5 million people; water and sanitation supplies for over 1 million people; and medical supplies for almost 2.5 million treatments in Aleppo, Dar'a, Hama, Idlib, Ladhiqiyah and Qunaytirah governorates. In line with resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), the United Nations notified the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of each shipment, including details regarding the content, destination and number of beneficiaries.

32. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism continued its operations in Jordan and Turkey. During the reporting period, the Mechanism monitored 14 United Nations humanitarian shipments consisting of 329 trucks, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each

shipment. The Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

33. One inter-agency cross-line convoy to Hula was completed in three phases: on 22 and 29 September and, following a delay due to insecurity, on 8 October. Multisector assistance was delivered to 19,500 families, including 12,000 in hard-to-reach areas. Government authorities prohibited water, sanitation and hygiene items and some medical items from being loaded.

34. Both international and Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continued to deliver multisector assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic in September, including the provision of services, in line with previous months.

Humanitarian access

35. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to many of the 12.2 million people in need of assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic remained extremely challenging in many areas because of active conflict and insecurity, as well as deliberate restrictions by the parties, including burdensome administrative procedures.

36. Access to the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach areas remained of critical concern. In September, United Nations agencies and partners reached 31 of the 127 hard-to-reach locations (24 per cent) overall. They reached 16 locations with food assistance for around 275,000 people, 13 locations with health support for over 90,000 medical treatments, seven locations with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for more than 358,000 people and seven locations with relief items for over 60,000 people. Over half of the people in hard-to-reach areas are in ISIL-controlled areas, to which the United Nations did not deliver assistance in September, aside from water treatment materials from UNICEF.

37. Active conflict in several governorates hindered the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as people's access to essential services. For example, fighting and insecurity continued to prevent the delivery of life-saving food assistance to over 1.2 million people in parts of Rif Dimashq, rural Homs and rural Hama governorates in September. Meanwhile, United Nations deliveries from Jordan through the Ramtha border crossing with Jordan were suspended between 9 and 16 September owing to the presence of landmines on the route used by convoys, which were subsequently cleared. The Bab al-Hawa border crossing was temporarily closed between 10 and 13 September following the death of a Turkish soldier in the vicinity of the crossing point after shots were fired at Turkish soldiers on patrol duty in Turkish territory. In Aleppo governorate, fighting between the Kurdish People's Protection Units and other non-State armed opposition groups in the Al-Sheikh Maksood neighbourhood at the end of September resulted in the temporary closure of a key access route linking eastern Aleppo city to the Bab al-Salam border crossing. The route was subsequently opened again.

38. Deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties also continued to prevent aid delivery. WFP continues to be unable to reach some 720,000 people in need in ISIL-controlled areas as plans to deliver assistance to these areas have been suspended owing to the inability to work independently and monitor activities. Meanwhile, Syrian authorities restricted the inclusion of 37 midwifery kits and water, sanitation and hygiene items in the United Nations inter-agency convoy to Al-Hula, Homs governorate, which would have benefited 1,850 pregnant women. In

Idlib, the planned delivery of food to 42,500 people in Idlib city was suspended owing to interference and lack of agreement with non-State armed opposition groups on the distribution of wheat flour.

39. No WFP shipments went through the Nusaybin/Qamishli crossing in September because of delays in obtaining the necessary approval from the Turkish authorities on account of the security conditions in north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic. Syrian authorities had approved shipments to cross the border. Nonetheless, WFP completed the dispatch of 90 per cent of the plan for Hasakah governorate in September using stock that had been shipped from Turkey in August with the consent of the Governments of Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic. On 9 October, Turkish authorities gave approval for WFP to conduct shipments through the crossing, while UNICEF was also approved to use the crossing to import $2.5 million worth of life-saving supplies.

40. As at 30 September, 23 out of the 85 inter-agency requests made in 2015 by the United Nations had been approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 46 requests were pending approval; and three requests had been put on hold by the United Nations because of insecurity. The remaining 13 requests are ones that had been previously submitted but were then overtaken by newer requests. Nine of the original requests were put on hold by the United Nations because of insecurity and the other four requests went unanswered by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic within a three-month time period and were resubmitted. On 30 September, the United Nations requested an additional 48 inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach and besieged locations during the coming three months.

41. Of the 23 requests approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 convoys have been completed and one has been partially completed. Of the remaining 12 requests for convoys approved in principle, five convoys have been unable to go because of lack of approval from the security forces of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic; two are held up because of a lack of agreement between the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Government on the access route; two are stalled by lack of approval by non-State armed opposition groups for safe passage; and one remains pending because of the security situation. The remaining two requests have been approved in principle and are under preparation.

42. In addition to inter-agency convoys, a number of requests for single-agency convoys remain pending until approval is received from Syrian authorities. WFP had six requests that have not been approved by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on account of security conditions in several locations in Dar'a and Rif Dimashq governorates during the reporting period, preventing the delivery of assistance to 33,000 people. In September, UNHCR had nine facilitation letters for the movement of core relief items that had not been approved by Syrian authorities on account of insecurity at the requested locations. A UNICEF cross-line mission to Madamiyet in Rif Dimashq, planned for 15-24 September, to deliver education and relief supplies for 10,000 children, is pending approval as at 14 October.

43. All UNRWA operations in Yarmouk remained suspended during the reporting period. The most recent UNRWA mission inside Yarmouk was conducted on 28 March. The passageway between Yarmouk and Yalda is a volatile area under the control of non-State armed opposition groups. Increased restrictions at the passageway were reported from 19 to 21 September, including a prohibition on

males older than 16 years of age passing through the checkpoint. These restrictions were subsequently lifted, although civilian access to the passageway remains unpredictable and risky. UNRWA was permitted to conduct six missions to Yalda during the reporting period, but was only permitted to provide medical services during these missions in response to a suspected outbreak of typhoid. UNRWA was not permitted to provide food and other much-needed forms of humanitarian assistance. The Syrian authorities have indicated that additional humanitarian assistance and services from UNRWA would be superfluous as civilians in the area are already adequately provided for. Other humanitarian organizations have reportedly been allowed to continue their operations and deliver assistance in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham. The local agreement reached in these three areas is holding and the authorities have continued to authorize a limited range of commercial goods to enter the area on a daily basis.

44. No major changes in the administrative procedures required by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for the delivery of humanitarian assistance were reported in September. The current administrative procedures continued to delay or limit the delivery of assistance by United Nations agencies and partners. Regarding the importation of health and nutrition goods more specifically, a new procedure was enacted stipulating that clearance of these items from any port of entry required additional approval from the Ministry of Health. This has delayed the clearance of four shipments containing nutrition supplements despite prior approval of the shipments having been received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

45. Progress continued to be made with regard to visas for United Nations staff members. In September, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic approved 120 visas for United Nations staff from 11 different offices, of which 36 were new visas and 84 were renewals. A total of 90 per cent of the approved visas in September were granted within the agreed 15 working day review period. As at 11 October, 31 United Nations visa requests (either new visas or renewals) remained pending, only nine of which were beyond the agreed 15 working day review period. No visa applications were rejected in September. The total number of visas rejected in 2015 is 39, exclusive of the four United Nations staff that were declared personae non gratae in February.

46. A total of 15 international NGOs are authorized to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic. These organizations continued to face a series of administrative hurdles and restrictions that have had an impact on their ability to operate. They remain restricted in their ability to partner with national humanitarian organizations, open sub-offices, conduct missions, join inter-agency convoys or undertake independent needs assessments. Six visas for staff of international NGOs remained pending as at 30 September, four of which were submitted in August or September. Four visas were approved in September, including one that was submitted during the same month. The United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator continues to lead discussions with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding visas and the operating framework for international NGOs.

47. Four additional national NGOs were authorized by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to partner with United Nations organizations in September. Two national NGOs were authorized to operate in Rif Dimashq, one in Aleppo and one in Damascus governorate. Overall, the number of national NGOs authorized to partner with United Nations organizations stands at 135 working through 218 branches.

Besieged areas

48. Of the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, some 422,000 remained besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic. This included 167,500 people besieged by Government forces in eastern Ghutah and Darayya; 26,500 people besieged by non-State armed opposition groups in Nubul and Zahra'; and 228,000 people besieged by ISIL in the government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city.

49. The parties to the conflict continued to entirely or heavily restrict access to besieged areas during the reporting period. During September, some 7,800 people were reached with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in one besieged location (1.8 per cent). No food, health or other relief items reached any besieged area. The flow of commercial supplies through official routes remained largely blocked, leading to high prices for those commodities reaching besieged areas through unofficial and irregular supply lines. Freedom of movement remained heavily restricted, although certain groups, such as students and members of reconciliation councils, were occasionally allowed to leave and return to besieged areas.

50. In eastern Ghutah, Rif Dimashq, some 163,500 people remain besieged in multiple locations by government forces. No United Nations assistance reached the besieged areas in eastern Ghutah during September.

51. In Darayya, Rif Dimashq, about 4,000 people remain besieged by government forces. No United Nations assistance reached the area during the reporting period. People in Darayya have not been assisted by the United Nations since October 2012.

52. In Nubul and Zahra', Aleppo governorate, about 26,500 people remain besieged by non-State armed opposition groups. No United Nations assistance reached the two villages in September. There continued, however, to be consistent and credible reports that access to and from the enclave for both commercial goods and people had improved.

53. Some 228,000 people living in the government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city are besieged by ISIL. In partnership with Syrian Arab Red Crescent, UNICEF distributed hygiene supplies and conducted hygiene promotion activities for some 7,800 people living in shelters for internally displaced people in the besieged part of the city.

Free passage of medical supplies, personnel and equipment

54. Access to medical care continued to be restricted by insecurity and restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict, resulting in increased prices for medicines, a reduction in pharmaceutical production and a shortage of medical supplies in local markets. The shortage of qualified medical staff and the degradation of essential services has further affected access to adequate medical care. The availability of life-saving health services, especially paediatric and maternal health services and routine vaccinations, are of critical concern in the north-eastern governorates, in Dar'a, Idlib, Hama and Aleppo governorates and the hard-to-reach and besieged areas of Rif Dimashq governorate. According to recent assessments by the Syrian Ministry of Health, supported by WHO and UNICEF, routine immunization coverage in the Syrian Arab Republic has dropped from 95 per cent in 2010 to 64 per cent in 2014 nationwide and in some places it was as low as 20 per cent.

55. In September, WHO did not make any further new individual requests to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for shipments to hard-to-reach and besieged areas. Requests by WHO to deliver medical assistance through an inter-agency convoy to Zabadani, Rif Dimashq and Foah and Kafraya and surrounding areas in Idlib governorate were approved by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs following the recent ceasefire agreement in these locations; however, the operation is still on hold because of security considerations and disagreements among the parties to the agreement. Two requests to provide Douma in Rif Dimashq with trauma and surgical supplies and haemodialysis sessions are still pending. Meanwhile, the United Nations and health sector partners continue to face extreme challenges in the delivery of medical supplies and the provision of preventative and curative services in ISIL-controlled areas.

56. In September, Physicians for Human Rights documented six attacks on medical facilities. All six were by government forces. Two attacks each occurred in Aleppo and Dayr al-Zawr governorates and one each in Idlib and Rif Dimashq governorates. In terms of medical personnel, Physicians for Human Rights documented the deaths of nine medical personnel, all of whom were targeted or killed in the line of duty. Eight medical personnel were killed by shelling and bombing by Syrian government forces and one doctor was executed by ISIL. Three were killed in Damascus governorate, three in Rif Dimashq, one in Dayr al-Zawr, and one in Idlib and one in Raqqah governorates.

Safety and security of staff and premises

57. On 29 September, three staff members of a Syrian NGO were killed in an attack on a medical facility in Kafr Batna in Rif Dimashq.

58. On 25 September gunfire occurred in front of the UNHCR office in Qamishli reportedly wounding five civilians.

59. On 15 September, a mortar hit a UNICEF-supported child friendly space in Aleppo, killing six and injuring two children. Two humanitarian workers were also injured in the attack. On the same day, a UNHCR-funded community centre in Aleppo was hit by several mortars. The centre was forced to close.

60. On 3 September a UNHCR armoured vehicle was caught in the middle of a demonstration in Aleppo city. Demonstrators tried to attack the vehicle and shouted slogans against the United Nations. Government forces intervened and the vehicle left the area safely.

61. A total of 36 United Nations staff members, 31 from UNRWA, one from the United Nations Development Programme, three from UNHCR and one from UNICEF, continue to be detained or missing. The total number of humanitarian workers killed in the conflict since March 2011 is 81. This includes 17 staff members of the United Nations, 48 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, eight volunteers and staff members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and eight staff members of international NGOs. Of the 81, 15 have been killed since 1 January 2015.

III. Observations

62. After nearly five years of fighting, the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to be characterized by a complete disregard for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to civilians, including women and children, in the context of hostilities. Parties to the conflict carry out attacks, lay siege to helpless communities, attack protected facilities, such as schools and hospitals, summarily kill civilians and commit acts that constitute torture and other ill-treatment. Serious violations have become the norm in many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic, often without any comment or attention being paid to them.

63. I strongly condemn the practice of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by any party to the conflict, including through the use of barrel bombs, heavy artillery, mortars and other explosive weapons in densely populated areas. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas will have a severe long-term humanitarian impact in the Syrian Arab Republic, resulting from the destruction of housing and essential infrastructure on which civilians depend. Such attacks must stop immediately. Those who carry out such serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law must be held to account. I repeat my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

64. In addition to conflict and insecurity, efforts to expand humanitarian assistance to those most in need continue to be met with delays and obstruction. However, I welcome the recent progress on approvals for visas for United Nations staff members by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I strongly urge that the progress on visas continue, and that it be followed by urgent and significant progress on approval for United Nations inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach and besieged locations. Humanitarian actors must be allowed to do their jobs without interference and the parties must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to affected people throughout the country. With further and sustained pressure from members of the Security Council and other Member States, the United Nations and its partners would be able to reach more people in need.

65. Despite the demands of the Security Council, resolution 2139 (2014) largely goes unimplemented month after month. We need a commitment from the parties to the conflict to fully implement the resolution. As a matter of urgency, more progress must be achieved in the five areas I outlined earlier this year: (a) addressing the relentless and indiscriminate attacks on civilians; (b) lifting the sieges; (c) ensuring access for the delivery of medical and surgical supplies to all parts of the country; (d) ending the practice of using the denial of key services as a weapon of war; and (e) rebuilding the education system in the Syrian Arab Republic.

66. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Europe has drawn fresh attention to the appalling humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries. While the United Nations and international and national NGOs continue to deliver aid to millions of people in need, humanitarian needs inside the Syrian Arab Republic continue to grow and deepen. In the absence of a political solution, we must continue to place focus on how best to help and support the Syrian people, whose hopes of returning to their homes and their country are diminishing by the day. I strongly encourage donors to maintain

and, where possible, increase, their generous support for life-saving humanitarian operations, as well as recovery and resilience activities, in 2016.

67. There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Only serious political action can address the aspirations of the Syrian people and resolve the root causes of the conflict. It must also be stressed again that humanitarian efforts, however essential they are, are no substitute for a credible political process, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, in particular the agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led transition. The Council must turn its words into deeds in the face of the continuing atrocities and need for a political solution. The absence of a political solution is condemning Syrians to live in chaos and is severely affecting future generations.